

ATHEISM, APOLOGETIC, AND NEGATIVE THEOLOGY IN THE GREEK APOLOGISTS OF THE SECOND CENTURY

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In the second century A.D., negative definition of deity appears occasionally and incidentally among the apostolic fathers;¹ it is prominent in the writings of the gnostics and their opponents; and it is also a significant feature in the apologists. But the Greek apologists of the second century have no concern for the *theory* of negative attributes.² And in practice they do not follow the negative way of Middle Platonism, in the sense of gradual elimination of positive attributes.³

What are the sources of the apologists' negative definition of deity? Daniélou, referring to Norden, has claimed that "according to one earlier school of thought this negative theology represented 'oriental' influence."⁴ However, Norden ascribes to oriental influence not negative theology in general, but only the concept of the unknown god;⁵ indeed, he finds the attribute "unknown" exceptional, since other negative terms for deity have been common in philosophical writers since Plato.⁶ Again, in investigating the origin of Justin's negative theology, Barnard states: "Goodenough is quite sure that his God is the God of Hellenistic Judaism and particularly that of Philo."⁷ However, on the one hand, there may be greater justification for Goodenough's view than Barnard allows;⁸ on the other hand, Goodenough also sees the philosophical background of Middle Platonism, especially Albinus, as particularly relevant for the appreciation of Justin's theology.⁹

The most widely held view has been that the apologists take over their negative theology from contemporary Middle Platonism.¹⁰ This view is correct, as far as it goes. But some recent scholars have given attention to other immediate and remote sources for the apologists' negative theology. Thus Daniélou shows that Hellenistic Judaism is also a valid source.¹¹ In addition, Theophilus's extended quotation from the *Sibylline Oracles* shows that the negative theology of Middle Platonism was sometimes channeled through Hellenistic Judaism into the apologists.¹² But the background to such negative definition extends to the early Presocratics.

The idea of an unbounded, unlimited, indefinite element in the nature of things goes back to the very beginnings of Greek philosophy. Already in Anaximander (sixth century B.C.) we meet the *apeiron*, the unbounded, inexhaustible reservoir of living stuff from which all things come and to which they return: and in the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition the Unlimited is the inseparable correlative of Limit ... In the later thought of Plato a formless, indefinite element ... appears as one of the ultimate constituents of the World of Forms itself. But the idea that the first principle of things, the supreme divinity, is itself in some sense infinite, does not seem to appear clearly and unmistakably in the Greek-speaking world before Philo of Alexandria.¹³

Another strand of negative theology derives from Xenophanes (sixth century B.C.), who criticizes the gods of Hesiod and Homer on the grounds of their immorality and anthropomorphism.¹⁴ In contrast he postulates:

One god, greatest among gods and men, in no way similar to mortals either in body or in thought.

Always he remains in the same place, moving not at all; nor is it fitting for him to go to different places at different times, but without toil he shakes all things by the thought of his mind.¹⁵

Xenophanes's negative statements about deity arise from the argumentative context of his discussion. This factor continues to operate in the development of Presocratic definition of deity.

Therefore, from the very beginning, philosophers expressed the fact that they disagreed by searching for and choosing new terms that were essentially, or at least to a considerable degree, negative terms. Thus Anaximander contradicted Thales, and at the same time tried to invent a more nearly perfect definition of the supreme god, by saying that the supreme god was the Apeiron, the Infinite and Indeterminate divine substance.¹⁶

While many negative terms may be traditional by the time the apologists use them, the polemical context of apologetic is still seen to exercise an influence. "Christians did not hesitate to accept the negative theology that logic required; for they wanted to destroy other gods and to insist that their God was unique."¹⁷ And with regard to Justin in particular: "Half his account of God is atheistic or negative. The 'gods' of the established religion, who beget and are begotten, who speak and are spoken of and who see and are, as idols, seen—these gods do not exist. God is unbegotten, ineffable and invisible."¹⁸

Against this background, one should not be too ready to play down the negative significance of negative theology. Prestige, for example, writes: "The negative forms are enriched with an infinite wealth of positive association."¹⁹ Indeed, it is not only the apologists who are

defended from the negative implications of their own formulae; the same had already been done for the Presocratics.

We may also note that these negative terms by which the search for perfection was expressed did not long remain mere negations, and therefore did not long remain practically devoid of significance and of positive meaning; either the philosopher himself, or his successors, proceeded to use these negations as if they were full of positive data, upon which he could construct the rest of his system, or his successors could construct their own denials.²⁰

However, such claims may be reversed, as they are by Wolfson with reference to later Platonists: "Moreover, to both Albinus and Plotinus, God may be described not only by predicates which are negative in form, such as 'indivisible,' but also by predicates which, though positive in form, are understood to be negative in meaning, as when, for instance, the term 'simple' is understood to mean 'indivisible.'"²¹ One need not ignore these cautionary remarks, but it remains true that there are historical reasons for the apologists' deliberate use of negative theological terms.

When modern scholars have given attention to the apologists' use of negative theology, they have frequently fitted it into a systematic framework, which is not in keeping with the method and purpose of the apologists themselves. In this approach, later doctrinal categories are imposed upon the material of the apologists. The method can be seen in a standard work from the middle of the nineteenth century.²² A classic treatment from the early twentieth century takes basically the same approach.²³ And more recently, with regard to Justin, it has been said: "Although he never sets out to give a single, succinct statement of his beliefs, it is possible to piece together a mosaic providing a clear and surprisingly full account of his doctrines of God, Creation, Incarnation, Atonement, the Church, the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, and the Last Things."²⁴ Such an approach may miss the significance of the apologists' use of negative theology.

Modern scholars also tend to take a synoptic view, drawing evidence for an apologist's theology from any part of an apology. And when an apologist wrote more than one work, a composite picture of his theology is formed on the basis of his various, and not necessarily apologetic, works. This is the case with Justin's two *Apologies* and his *Dialogue with Trypho*;²⁵ and with Athenagoras's *Plea for the Christians* and *On the Resurrection*, when the latter work is regarded as authentic.²⁶ While modern scholars must be allowed to put their own

questions to ancient texts, it remains to be seen whether negative theological language tends to be concentrated in particular contexts in each apology, and whether it plays a particular role in the structure of the apologetic argument.

It is conventional and convenient to treat Aristides, Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras and Theophilus as the main Greek apologetic writers of the second century. The works of other Greeks, who are known to have produced apologetic writings in this period, are too fragmentary to be used in the present enquiry. After the main second-century Greeks, later apologists both Greek and Latin speak to a perceptibly different situation, despite a degree of continuity.²⁷ Even among the main group of writings, the form, structure and contents are never exactly the same. And there is no constant correlation between the manner of treatment and the type of addressee, whether imperial authorities, a pagan inquirer, or people of Greek culture in general. With the main group of apologies it is justifiable to associate the fragmentary and apparently early *Preaching of Peter*, and the so-called "*Epistle*" to *Diognetus* of disputed date, each of which shares some significant motifs with the apologies.

For present purposes, it is not important to decide whether any of the apologies was actually delivered as a public address, and to its designated addressees. One may readily agree with Keresztes's view, that the apologies are not to be regarded as belonging purely to forensic rhetoric.²⁸ At the same time, one may not be convinced that Justin's *First Apology* is solely "an *advice* which has both the form and the atmosphere of the deliberative *rhetoric*."²⁹ In the case of Athenagoras, Malherbe found it "useful to compare the structure of the *Supplicatio*, and in particular the exposition in chapters IV-XII, with the structure of the summary of Plato's philosophy found in a handbook like that of Albinus."³⁰ But this illuminating analysis does not lead one to regard Athenagoras's *Plea* as a whole as a philosophic treatise. Again, while there is no denying that some apologies are ostensibly addressed to imperial authorities, it is perhaps too narrow a view to conclude that "most of these writings are legal documents, petitions to the state for careful investigation of what Christianity really was."³¹ Rather, the debt of the apologists to Hellenistic culture is manifold, woven from various strands of rhetoric and philosophy.

In order to assess the use of negative theology in the Greek apologies of the second century, these writings will be considered in their probable

chronological order. The earliest, proto-apologetic work is the *Preaching of Peter* (c. 110 A.D.). This writing is preserved only in fragmentary form, mainly in Clement of Alexandria's *Miscellanies*. "The scanty remains of the (*Preaching of Peter*) that have come down to us do not permit us to make precise statements of any sort about the composition of the work."³² However, at least the passages in Clement, *Miscellanies* 6, 5, 39-41 appear to be quoted in their original order.³³ Here negative definition of deity occurs in the context of an emphasis on monotheism. Thus "the one God who created the beginning of all things" is described as "the Invisible who sees all things; the Incomprehensible who comprehends all things; the One who needs nothing, of whom all things stand in need" etc.³⁴ The creation context helps to account for the series of reversals in the description: God is "invisible" but "sees all things" etc.³⁵ This God is not to be worshipped in the manner of the Greeks, nor of the Jews, but in the manner of the Christians under the new covenant who constitute a third race.³⁶ Greek worship is rejected on the ground that it is offered to material images of wood or metal,³⁷ or to animals which God intended as food for mankind. Thus the reason for the rejection of pagan worship is that its objects are the opposite of the true God: they are visible, created, perishable, etc., whereas God is invisible, uncreated, imperishable. The contrast, of course, points back to the beginning of the rationalist Greek criticism of the gods, and the origins of negative theology.

The so-called "*Epistle*" to *Diognetus* seem not to be an epistle; and, despite its appearance among the apostolic fathers in modern editions, "the basic theme, the plan, the argument, the doctrine, the vocabulary relate the *Ad Diognetum* much more closely to the group of surviving writings attributed to the Apologists."³⁸ Concerning the date of the writing, there has been much discussion, and many different alternatives have been proposed.³⁹ Arguments for an early date in about the third decade of the second century seem to me the most compelling.⁴⁰ *Diogn.* announces a series of questions (1), and then, parallel to *Preaching of Peter*, discusses pagan (2), Jewish (3-4) and Christian religion (5-9); ch. 10 constitutes a conclusion.⁴¹ Like *Preaching of Peter*, *Diogn.* follows Jewish precedent in arguing against pagan deities as being mere images made of physical substances and, as such, perishable (2, 2-3). The writer uses a sort of inverted negative theology, when he asks rhetorically whether the pagan deities are not "dumb" (i.e. without speech), "blind" (i.e. without sight), "without life, without perception,

without movement" (2, 4). The implications of this critique for a Christian concept of God—namely, that God is immaterial, imperishable, etc.—are not spelled out. Nor is there any clear evidence of a charge of atheism being made against the Christians. But the writer at least indicates the connexion between the Christian rejection of pagan deities, and the consequent hatred of Christians by pagans: "You call these things gods, you serve them, you worship them, and finally you become like them. That is why you hate Christians, because they do not regard them as gods." (2, 5-6)

Whereas the *Preaching of Peter* merely described God as being in need of nothing, *Diogn.* uses the same attribute as the ground for rejecting the sacrificial ritual of Judaism.⁴² Thus, although it is acknowledged that Jews and Christians worship the same God, the Jews "ought to regard it as foolishness, not reverence, that they offer these things to God as though he were in need" (3, 3).⁴³ In its presentation of the Christian religion, *Diogn.* first deals with Christians as a social group in relation to the rest of the world (5-6), then defines Christians as those who are entrusted with Jesus (7-9). Jesus as the truth or word of God is the representative of the invisible⁴⁴ God, the creator and ruler of the world (7). "For before he came, what man had any knowledge at all of what God is?" (8, 1) A brief digression rejects Greek philosophical interpretations of deity as one of the elements: fire, water, etc. (8, 2-4). Then the writer returns to the idea of God's self-revelation in Jesus:

No man saw God nor made him known, but he revealed himself; and he revealed through faith, through which alone it has been made possible to see God (8, 5-6).

In this paradoxical expression, the God who is unseen and unknown has made himself known and visible to faith. The negative theology of God's transcendence has been converted to positive theology by the incarnation.

So far as our limited evidence goes, it seems that the *Preaching of Peter* begins with God and moves on to mankind, which is subdivided into Greeks, Jews, and Christians. Similarly *Diogn.*, after announcing several questions at the outset, deals in turn with pagan, Jewish and Christian religion. The *Apology* of Aristides (addressed to Antoninus Pius c. 140 A.D.)⁴⁵ elaborates this pattern: after presenting the deity (1), the writer turns to mankind in general (2), which he then treats under the headings of barbarians (3-7), Greeks (8-11, 13), Egyptians (12), Jews (14) and Christians (15-17).⁴⁶ The main concentration of negative

theological language occurs in ch. 1, which quickly moves from the evidence of creation to the nature of the creator God.⁴⁷ This God is incomprehensible,⁴⁸ unbegotten, uncreated, without beginning, without end, immortal, incomprehensible (again); he has no needs, no name, no form nor composition of members; he is not male nor female; the heavens do not contain him; he has no adversary; he does not possess anger nor resentment; ignorance and forgetfulness are not in his nature; he requires no sacrifice nor libation, nor anything visible; he does not require anything from anyone.⁴⁹ Thus Aristides defines his concept of God at the outset, and uses negative theology to reinforce his positive idea of God the creator.

In ch. 2 Aristides makes an abrupt transition from God to mankind, which he divides into those who participate in the truth about which he has spoken (in ch. 1), and those who stray from it. In assessing mankind against this criterion, he deals first with the barbarians, who worshipped created things instead of the creator, especially man-made idols composed of elements (3). But the elements, like mankind, are destructible; God is imperishable, unchangeable, invisible (4). Therefore the earth is not a god (4). Similarly water, fire, wind and sun are not gods (5-6). Nor are men of the past gods—an anti-Euhemeristic statement. Man is composed of the four elements together with soul and spirit, and has a beginning and an end. But this is not the case with God, who is uncreated and incorruptible (7). In this section negative theology is employed to distinguish God from man and from man-made idols, and to reject barbarian worship of such idols.

In subsequent chapters (8-13), Greek and Egyptian deities are rejected on moral grounds, as well as because they do not measure up to the standard of ch. 1. Towards the end of this section, Aristides brings against Greek gods the usual argument, that they are “dead idols and senseless images.” Even the poets and philosophers go wrong in maintaining that they are gods, and in trying to make them like God. But “no man has ever seen to whom He is like; nor is he able to see Him.” Moreover, when they say that God accepts various sacrifices and temples, they attribute deficiency to him. “But God is not needy and none of these things is sought for by Him.”⁵⁰ Here Aristides has only moved from the practical to the theoretical level, as he uses negative theology to reject the positive ideas of Greek thinkers concerning their deities. Aristides proceeds to reject the claim of Greek poets and philosophers, “that the nature of all their gods is one.” He allows for

the sake of argument the notion that the Greek gods deserve admiration, but only in order to argue *a minori ad maius* for his own idea of God.—“If then it is proper that we should admire a god who is visible and does not see, how much more is this worthy of admiration that a man should believe in a nature which is invisible and all-seeing!” (13, tr. Harris) Here negative definition of the Christian God is used in an artistic double contrast with Greek deities—visible: does not see; invisible: all-seeing.

The treatment of Judaism and Christianity which follows does not contribute directly to the present enquiry.⁵¹ In summary, then, Aristides begins with God, whose nature is defined largely in negative terms (1). He then moves on to the races of mankind, but only in order to assess their various conceptions of God. Besides the main concentration of negative theological language in ch. 1, such language is also used in arguing against barbarian worship of perishable, man-made idols (3), against the divinization of the natural elements themselves (4-6), and hence against divinized human beings composed, in part, of the four elements (7). Negative theology is used in a similar way in arguing against idolatrous and mythical conceptions of deity among the Greeks (13).

Justin's *First Apology* was addressed to Antoninus Pius and his two adopted sons c. 150 A.D.⁵² “The effort to find a clear outline in the First Apology has baffled commentators ...”⁵³ However, the wide variety of issues with which Justin deals can perhaps be subsumed under a few broad headings: address (1), appeal for fair hearing (2-5), defence against charge of atheism (6-29), defence against anticipated objection that Christ was only a human being (30-60), Christian liturgy (61-67), conclusion (68).⁵⁴ The main use of negative theological terminology occurs at particular stages within Justin's defence against the charge of atheism—a topic which appears here for the first time in Christian apologetic literature. Justin announces the charge and makes an ironic confession.⁵⁵ After a digression he picks up the accusation, and reinterprets it, so that it becomes a rejection of pagan deities, which are said to be corruptible and in need of care.⁵⁶ Conversely, Christian tradition maintains that “God does not need any material offering from men.”⁵⁷ And this God is “called by no set name.”⁵⁸

According to Justin, “it is Jesus Christ who taught us these things, who was begotten for this purpose,” and whom Christians rank second after the Father and before the Spirit (1 *Apol.* 13, 3). Opponents of

Christianity, it is acknowledged, declare that this is madness, "saying that we give second place after the unchangeable and eternal God and begetter of all to a crucified man" (1 *Apol.* 13, 4). However, new converts to Christianity now "follow the unbegotten God alone through his son; those who once ... used magic having now devoted themselves to the good and unbegotten God" (1 *Apol.* 14, 1-2). Justin brings Jesus into his discussion in this section as the one who taught Christians the true worship of the true God, which shows that Christians are not atheists. The particular terms of negative theology which here occur are determined by the context in Justin's apologetic argument. Thus Justin rejects any discrepancy between the "unchangeable and eternal" Father and the "crucified man," who is his son. Justin would agree with his opponents, that this God is the "begetter of all" and is himself "unbegotten;" but God is also the father of the one who was "begotten for this purpose."

Having introduced Jesus as the source of Christian teaching, Justin allows himself to elaborate the (primarily ethical) teaching of Jesus for its own sake (1 *Apol.* 15-17). The reporting of a particular dominical saying⁵⁹ leads Justin into a digression on the state of persons after death and on eschatology (1 *Apol.* 18-20). Justin returns to Jesus in chh. 21-22, and speaks of his divine birth and ascension as analogous to Greek beliefs. The analogy leads to two further points: first, though Christians make similar claims to those of the Greeks, they alone are hated because of the name of Christ (1 *Apol.* 24, 1); secondly, Christians who once worshipped the so-called gods of the Greeks, now through Jesus Christ despise them, though threatened with death, and have dedicated themselves to the unbegotten and impassible God (1 *Apol.* 25, 1-2). In the present context the negative epithets (unbegotten, impassible) have particular relevance to the Greek deities just mentioned (Dionysos, Apollo, Persephone, Aphrodite, Adonis, Asklepios), who did not share these attributes. More generally, Justin uses his negative definition of deity in the oppressive socio-political situation of hatred and the threat of death, in order to reject the old gods and to express his commitment to the transcendent God of Christian belief.⁶⁰

Tatian's apology (177 A.D.)⁶¹ is addressed neither to Roman officials nor to an individual pagan inquirer, but to "the Greeks" in general. In an introduction (1-3) he commands the Greeks not to be so hostile towards the barbarians (1, 1), and rhetorically asks them what noble thing they have produced by their philosophizing (2, 1).⁶² The

doctrinal section of the apology (4-20) begins with Tatian's concept of God (4-5), and proceeds to discuss resurrection and judgment (6), the fall of man (7), and demonology (8-20). The second half of the apology consists of an attack on Greek culture (21-30), and a demonstration that the Christian "philosophy" is older and better than the systems of the Greeks (31-41).⁶³ Tatian's autobiographical conclusion (42) emphasizes his basic concern with God,⁶⁴ and so points back to the beginning of the body of the apology.

Although the apology is not addressed to the political authorities, the opening sentence of the body of the writing shows that the political and forensic dimension is certainly in the author's mind. For Tatian asks why the Greeks want to create a clash between the Christians and the authorities as in a boxing match (4, 1). He claims to be ready to perform his political duties. "Only when I am being ordered to deny (God), I will not obey, but will rather die, so that I may not be shown to be false and ungrateful" (4, 1). The issue of the denial of God—clearly in a political, not philosophical, context⁶⁵—is directly related to Tatian's definition of God. God is not visible, not comprehensible by human skill; he does not have any origin in time; he alone is without beginning; he is spirit but does not pervade matter; he is intangible, unnamable, and not in need of anything (4, 1-2). God is known from his creation, but Tatian is not willing to worship things created by God (sun, moon) or by man (images of wood and stone) (4, 2). "The unnamable God is not to be bribed with gifts; for he who is not in need of anything should not be misrepresented by us as in need" (4, 2-3). Tatian thus uses negative theology in standard ways, in order to reject both the pagan deification of material objects and the material offerings of cult.

Athenagoras's *Plea for the Christians* (c. 177 A.D.) is addressed to the joint emperors, Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus. Among the second-century apologies it has not only the most irenic tone but also the neatest structure. After an introduction requesting a fair hearing (1-2), Athenagoras in a summary statement (division of topics) rejects the three basic charges of atheism, cannibalism and incest (3), before making an extended defence against the first charge (4-30). The charges of immorality receive much briefer treatment (31-36). The concluding chapter (37) balances the introduction. As in Justin's *First Apology*, Athenagoras uses negative theological language to define his concept of God in the context of his defence against the charge of atheism.

Athenagoras divides the accusation of atheism into two parts, defending Christians first against the charge of theoretical atheism (4-12), and secondly against the charge of practical atheism (13-30). At the outset Athenagoras regards it as ridiculous to have to defend Christians against the charge at all; it is irrational that people should apply the term "atheism" to Christians, who distinguish God from matter; for the divine is uncreated and eternal and is seen only by mind and reason, whereas matter is created and perishable (4, 1). To this point Athenagoras adds the Christian commitment to monotheism.⁶⁶ But he then proceeds to distil a spiritual and monotheistic understanding of God from a series of Greek poets and philosophers (5-6). The mixture of positive and negative attributes of deity which emerges from these sources is selected by Athenagoras for his present purpose. Thus, negatively, God is found to be ineffable, uncreated, unmoved.⁶⁷ "If, then, Plato is not an atheist, when he thinks of the uncreated God, the maker of the universe, as one, neither are we atheists, when we know and affirm as God him by whom all things have been made through the word and sustained through the spirit which comes from him" (6, 2). In the course of presenting rational arguments for the unity of God, Athenagoras maintains that God, unlike man, is "uncreated, impassible and indivisible; therefore not consisting of parts" (8, 3). After supporting reason by scripture (9), Athenagoras uses a conglomeration of negative terms to sum up the monotheistic aspect of his defence against the charge of atheism: "It has been adequately shown by me, that we are not atheists, since we believe in one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible and illimitable, comprehended by mind and reason alone ..." (10, 1).

In maintaining that Christians are not guilty of practical atheism, Athenagoras first responds to the charge of failure to sacrifice. He presents the usual argument, that God has no needs.⁶⁸ Secondly, in replying to the charge of rejecting the gods of the cities, Athenagoras gives a selective list of the multiplicity of gods of the various cities, before summarizing his defence: "If, then, we are impious, because we do not show the same piety as they, all cities and all nations are impious; for they do not all believe in the same gods" (14, 3). Athenagoras then picks up from ch. 4 his distinction between the divine, which is uncreated and eternal, and the material, which is created and perishable. Most people, being unable to appreciate the great difference between God and matter, resort to material idols (15, 1). But Athenagoras rejects

idolatry with the usual argument against worshipping the creature rather than the creator—an argument which he applies both to idols made by man from materials provided by God (15, 2-4) and to the elements which were made directly by God (16).⁶⁹ More precise than some apologists, Athenagoras allows a distinction between idols as being only statues, and the allegedly real gods they represent (18, 1). But against those who claim that these gods really exist, Athenagoras argues that the gods of myth came to be and are perishable, and therefore do not exist, whereas the true God is uncreated and eternal (19, 1-2). Athenagoras further complains that the gods of Greek myth are corporeal, and illustrates the point with the worst possible examples of anthropomorphic and monstrous deities drawn especially from the cosmogonic myths. But “if they do not differ from the lowest beasts, they are not gods; for clearly the divine must be differentiated from what is earthly and derived from matter” (20, 5). The Greek gods not only are corporeal, but have passions of anger and desire, which is ridiculous; for in God there is neither anger nor desire (21, 1). Throughout this section of his apology, Athenagoras has been defining his concept of God in negative terms in polemical contrast to the pagan concepts of deity which he rejects. At the same time, this whole argument functions as a defence against the charge of atheism, since the gods whom the Christians reject are shown not to deserve the status of God.

But the argument continues. According to Athenagoras, it is not satisfactory to interpret the gods of Greek myth as natural forces; for, if we follow Empedocles, “we shall without realizing it make perishable, fluctuating and changeable matter equal to the uncreated, eternal and constantly self-consistent God” (22, 3). Athenagoras would acknowledge the Stoic view that the supreme God is uncreated and eternal, but he rejects the consequences of pantheism, since elements of the physical world are to be destroyed in the conflagration according to Stoic belief (22, 5). Against the allegorical interpretation of the succession myth of Kronos and Zeus, Athenagoras objects: “if Kronos is time, he changes; if he is season, he alters; but the divine neither changes nor varies” (22, 7). Thus negative theology is used to counter not only the gods of Greek myth, but also the philosophical interpretations of myth and Stoic religious philosophy.

After arguing against the alleged power of idols on the ground that it is demonic (23-27), Athenagoras concludes his defence against the

charge of practical atheism by presenting a Euhemeristic view of the pagan gods (28-30). With reference to a fragment of Euripides and a passage of Pindar, Athenagoras claims that gods would not have concerned themselves with gold, since the divine is not in need and is above desire; nor would they have died (29, 3). As his final example, Athenagoras treats two lines of Callimachus's *Hymn to Zeus* with some sophistication.

"The Cretans are always liars; for your tomb, O Lord,
The Cretans devised; but you did not die."

Although you believe in the birth of Zeus, Callimachus, you do not believe in his tomb; and although you think you are obscuring the truth, you are actually proclaiming to those who do not know it the death (of Zeus). And if you look at the cave, you recall Rhea's childbirth; but if you see the tomb, you obfuscate the fact of his death, not realizing that the uncreated God is eternal. (30, 3)

In short, worship of the pagan gods is unnecessary, since they do not exist if the usual myths are unreliable; but if the myths are true, then these gods have ceased to be and no longer exist, just as they came into being from non-existence (30, 4).

Thus in his defence against the charge of practical and theoretical atheism, Athenagoras criticizes the pagan gods with a series of attributes describing their inadequacy. This critique is balanced by a corresponding series of negative attributes which Athenagoras applies to the Christian God. Christians are not to be considered atheists on the ground that they do not believe in the pagan gods, since these beings do not deserve divine status. Conversely, since Christians do believe in the transcendent deity whom Athenagoras describes in negative terms, they cannot be regarded as atheists on this ground either.

Theophilus of Antioch addressed his *Apology* to an individual pagan acquaintance, Autolycus, c. 180 A.D.⁷⁰ The main purpose of Book 1 is announced in the introduction (1, 1-2) as being the presentation of the Christian idea of God.⁷¹ After treating the attributes of God (1, 3-4), Theophilus shows how God is seen through his providence and works (1, 5-7). There follows a preliminary discussion of resurrection (1, 8). From the Christian God Theophilus turns to criticism of the Greek gods (1, 9-10) and rejection of worship of the Roman emperor (1, 11). Then he picks up from 1, 1 Autolycus's ridicule of the name "Christian" (1, 12), before reverting to resurrection and judgment (1, 13-14; cf. 1, 8). In Book 2 Theophilus undertakes to show Autolycus more accurately the pointlessness of his own religion (2, 1). So he proceeds to a more

extended criticism of the Greek gods (2, 2-8; cf. 1, 9-11), dealing first with the material images made by men and the anthropomorphic myths (2, 2-3), and secondly with philosophic and poetic views of God (2, 4-8). By contrast, prophetic inspiration provided the true idea of God (2, 9-38); Theophilus first treats the creation story in general as prophetically inspired (2, 9-11), then proceeds to an extended exegesis of parts of Genesis, especially Gen. 1-4 (2, 12-32); this exposition leads to an extensive series of conclusions (2, 33-38). In Book 3 Theophilus intends to show the antiquity of the Christian (i.e. Old Testament) scriptures and the nonsense of "the rest" (3, 1). Taking the latter point first, he rejects the validity of pagan writings (3, 2-3). His main concern here is that pagans have been misled about the nature of Christianity. So he proceeds (3, 4-15) to defend Christians against the charges of cannibalism (3, 5) and sexual immorality (3, 6), and to treat the question of God's existence (3, 7-8) and the ethics commanded by God (3, 9-15). Only then does he return to the issue of the antiquity of Christian teaching,⁷² which he attempts to demonstrate by his long chronology (3, 16-29). The last chapter is a conclusion to Book 3 and to the whole work (3, 30).

While introducing the main topic of Book 1, Theophilus claims that Autolycus has attacked him by boasting of his own gods of wood and stone, "which neither see nor hear, since they are idols and the work of men's hands" (1, 1). Thus in passing Theophilus rejects the pagan gods by describing them in the terms of the Psalmist.⁷³ In describing the Christian God, Theophilus begins with negative attributes which are mostly related to a positive quality. Thus the form of God is ineffable and inexpressible; he is in glory uncontainable, in greatness incomprehensible, in height inconceivable, in strength incomparable, in wisdom unequalled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness indescribable (1, 3). The mode of expression then changes to a series of conditional sentences containing positive attributes: "If I call him light, I speak of his creature;" etc. The point seems to be that these attributes, though complimentary, are all inadequate.⁷⁴ This description may be regarded as an exercise in negative definition by remotion: God (it is implied) is not light, etc., not in the sense that he is darkness, but rather God is excluded "from the sphere of discourse of the predicate in question."⁷⁵ Theophilus's mode of expression changes again to a series of causal clauses or phrases: God "is without beginning, because he is uncreated; he is unchangeable, because he is immortal" (1, 4 *init.*; positive attributes then follow). All these negative attributes set the Christian God in contrast to the pagan gods of whom Autolycus has boasted (1, 1).

Theophilus has already made considerable use of the idea of man's ability or inability to see God, in order to express the distinction between Christian and pagan.⁷⁶ Against this background, he uses the attribute of invisibility⁷⁷ to introduce his next point: "For as the soul in man is not seen, being invisible to men, but the soul is perceived through the motion of the body, so it would not be possible for God to be seen by human eyes, but he is seen and perceived through his providence and works" (1, 5 *init.*). To conclude his discussion of this point, Theophilus uses the same negative attribute, invisibility, together with immortality: "If you perceive these things ..., you can see God ... When you put off mortality and put on imperishability, then you will see God as you deserve ... And then, having become immortal you will see the Immortal ..." (1, 7 *fin.*).

This eschatological reference leads Theophilus into a preliminary discussion of resurrection (1, 8; cf. 1, 13-14). His last argument for resurrection proceeds *a minori ad maius*: if Autolycus believes that statues made by *men* are gods and perform miracles, then he ought to believe that *God* who created the living will be able to recreate the dead (1, 8 *fin.*). After this incidental reference to the statues of the pagan gods, Theophilus launches into a critique of pagan gods on various grounds. Greek and oriental mystery deities are rejected on Euhemeristic and moral grounds (1, 9). The mere mention of Egyptian worship of animal deities is sufficient criticism; while the gods of Greece and other nations are rejected as made of stone, wood and other material substances (1, 10 *init.*; cf. 1, 1). The multiplicity of types of Zeus is an argument against his real existence. In short, the pagan deities are only man-made idols (1, 10 *fin.*). Theophilus's basic, if implicit, objection to pagan religion is that it involves worship of the creature rather than the creator—a standard apologetic theme. This appears more clearly in the objection to emperor-worship which follows immediately: "Therefore I shall rather honour the emperor, not worshipping him, but praying for him; but God I worship as the real and true God, knowing that the emperor has been created by him" (1, 11 *init.*). This rejection of pagan religion (1, 9-11) is subordinate to the presentation of the Christian God in Book 1, but does not involve any further use of negative theology, nor any explicit defence against the charge of atheism.

Further criticism of the Greek gods is the main topic of Book 2. Once again they are rejected as man-made, material objects (2, 3; cf. 1, 1 and

10); and their existence is questioned on the ground that their genesis, once prolific (according to the myths), is no longer evident (2, 3). In discussing the views of the philosophers, Theophilus criticizes the (alleged) atheism of Stoics and Epicureans (2, 4 *init.*). Platonists acknowledge that God is uncreated; but, since they assume that matter is also uncreated, the sole supremacy of God is thereby denied; if matter is uncreated, it is unchangeable and equal to God, since the uncreated is immutable and unchangeable (2, 4). Thus Theophilus approves the Platonists' negative definition of deity, but rejects the similar status which they allow to matter.

The error of Greek philosophers and poets in general arose because they were inspired by demons, not by a pure spirit (2, 8). By contrast, the (Old Testament) prophets were truly inspired by the Holy Spirit (2, 9 *init.*). According to the prophetic account of creation, God was without need, since the Uncreated needs nothing (2, 10 *init.*). As his exegesis of Genesis proceeds, Theophilus anticipates an objection to the expression that God was "walking in paradise," since God must not be confined in a place; God is indeed unconfined and is not found in a place (2, 22, with reference to Gen. 3, 8). Later Theophilus gives an anti-polytheistic interpretation of the creation of Eve. So that it would not be presumed that Adam was made by one deity and Eve by another, God made the two together, forming Eve from Adam's side; in fact, the words of the serpent, "You will be like gods," already show a tendency to polytheism (2, 28, with reference to Gen. 2, 22 and 3, 5). When Theophilus begins to draw conclusions from his biblical exegesis, he repeats the anti-polytheistic comment.⁷⁸

Other repetitions occur as Theophilus draws further conclusions. It has been shown from the pagan writers themselves that the names of the so-called gods are names of men (2, 34; cf. 1, 9). And Theophilus complains that the majority of people still worship man-made idols (2, 34; cf. 1, 1 and 10; 2, 2). Moreover, the divine law forbids the worship not only of idols but of the heavenly bodies (2, 35 *init.*). The prophets grieved over mankind's atheism (2, 35). Treating the Sibyl as a representative of pagan prophecy in general, Theophilus no doubt aims to refute Autolycus from his "own" prophetic writings (2, 36 *init.*). In the first fragment which Theophilus quotes, negative theology is used in support of the uniqueness and transcendence of God: he is uncreated (vv. 7 and 17), invisible (v. 8), immortal (v. 11) and unerring (v. 28).⁷⁹ A second quotation criticizes the so-called created gods: if anything created also

perishes, no god can have been formed from the loins and womb of man (vv. 1-2); no mortal can know the full account of creation—only God himself, the immortal, eternal creator, knows (vv. 15-17); created things, whether animals (vv. 22-28) or inanimate objects of stone and wood (vv. 29-31), do not deserve to be treated as gods. Here negative theology contrasts the creator with created things. Theophilus next draws on Greek poets to support the Sibyl (2, 37-38); and as he brings the Book to an end, he again contrasts polytheism and monotheism, intending to show the pagan writers' inconsistency: "Therefore although the writers spoke about a multitude of gods, they came back to monotheism (*monarchia*)" (2, 38; cf. 2, 28 and 33).

At the beginning of Book 3 Theophilus rejects the validity of major Greek writers and thinkers, including Empedocles and his teaching of atheism (3, 2). In summary, Theophilus's rhetorical questions concerning all these figures are intended to illustrate their useless and atheistic thinking (3, 2 *fin.*). The various writers contradict each other, or even themselves; so, for instance, they spoke about gods, but later taught atheism (3, 3 *init.*). Attempting to write about purity, they declare that the gods were the first to join in unspeakable unions and unlawful meals (3, 3). Here is an implicit but clear rejection of pagan gods on moral grounds, which involves a double irony. For the charges made against the pagan gods are the same as those against which Theophilus will defend Christians in 3, 5-6. And one of the negative epithets used here in criticism recalls the negative theology of other contexts: "unspeakable" (*arrētos*) has elsewhere been used as "ineffable."

Theophilus attributes the charges of cannibalism and sexual immorality to "atheistic mouths falsely libelling us, the pious, who are called Christian" (3, 4). On these issues Theophilus seems to think attack the best means of defence. So instead of defending Christians against the charge of cannibalism, he turns the charge against the pagans. Here atheism is not a separate charge, but cannibalism is denounced as atheistic.⁸⁰ The charge of sexual immorality is also turned back against the Greek philosophers; in the case of Epicurus, his alleged advocacy of incestuous intercourse is disapproved by being associated with his teaching of atheism (3, 6). While Theophilus does not formally claim to defend Christians against the charge of atheism, he does move from the issues of cannibalism and sexual immorality to that of the existence of God and pagan atheism; so again it must be presumed that Theophilus's attack on paganism constitutes his defence of

Christianity.⁸¹ As elsewhere, Theophilus alleges the inconsistency of the pagan writers: "For having said that the gods exist, they again reduced them to nothing" (3, 7 *init.*).⁸² In summary, "those who produced such philosophy are by their own precepts convicted of atheism, or indeed of promiscuity and unlawful intercourse. Moreover, even cannibalism is found among them according to their own writings, and they describe the gods whom they have honoured as the first to have done these things." (3, 8 *fin.*)⁸³

Theophilus's is by far the longest of the extant second-century Greek apologies, and the only one which is organized by its author in more than one book. Within its overall structure, its style is often rambling and repetitive. It may, therefore, be as well to draw together the main issues of the foregoing discussion, which has examined the three Books in sequence. Theophilus rejects pagan gods as material idols (1, 1; 1, 10; 2, 2; 2, 34; 2, 36 [second Sibylline fragment, vv. 29-31]). He rejects Greek and oriental mystery deities on Euhemeristic (1, 10; 2, 34) and moral grounds (1, 10; 3, 3). The many types of Zeus argue against the reality of the supreme deity of Greek myth (1, 10). The Roman emperor, a mere creature, is not to be worshipped as divine (1, 11). The real existence of Greek gods is rejected on the grounds that the once plentiful births of gods (in myth) are no longer reported (2, 3). And Theophilus argues against polytheism in general by his interpretation of the story of Eve's creation (2, 28; cf. 2, 33 and 38). Apart from these arguments, divine law forbids the worship both of idols and of heavenly bodies (2, 35). By contrast with this picture of pagan gods, Theophilus describes the Christian God in negative terms (especially 1, 3-4; cf. 1, 5-7; 2, 10; 2, 22; and the two quotations from the *Sibylline Oracles* in 2, 36). Besides criticizing the gods of Greek myth and cult, Theophilus also attacks the alleged atheism of major Greek thinkers, including Platonists, Stoics and Epicureans (2, 4; 3, 2-3 and 6). But his attack on pagan atheism seems also to be intended as a defence of Christianity against the same charge (3, 7-8). Even the associated charges of cannibalism and sexual immorality are attributed to pagan atheism (3, 4).

The Greek apologists of the second century make significant use of negative theology, which they take over from other sources. The main source is no doubt contemporary Middle Platonism. But the influence of Middle Platonism itself has sometimes been mediated by Hellenistic Judaism. Moreover, the apologists' use of negative theology is selective. Particular terms are chosen in order to oppose pagan concepts of deity.

This polemic-apologetic function of negative theology recalls its origin in Greek philosophy as far back as the early Presocratics. On the other hand, the choice of negative theological terms is also determined by the Christian concept of God which the apologists wish to convey.⁴ The apologists' criticisms of the pagan gods show that Christians are indeed atheists as far as those gods are concerned. And this becomes a charge against which the apologists defend Christianity. The charge may be ironically admitted by Justin, but it is also firmly rejected both by Justin and by subsequent apologists. And they turn the charge, if not directly against their pagan accusers, then at least against a strand of Greek philosophical thought. The apologists use negative theology at particular stages of their argument; but the variety of ways in which they organize their argument makes it difficult to generalize, despite the common features. However, broadly speaking, there is an interrelation of atheism and negative theology in the apologetic argument. The atheism of the Christian apologists with respect to the pagan gods is expressed in criticism on various grounds, while the Christian God is defined in negative terms in opposition to the concepts so criticized. At the same time the definition of God in negative terms allows the apologists to reject the charge of atheism against the Christians.

NOTES

¹ Ign. *Pol.* 3, 2 (God is above season, timeless, invisible, impalpable, impassible); *Herm. Man.* 1 (uncontained). Cf. also Acts of Martyrs of Vienne and Lyons in Eusebius, *H.E.* 5, 1, 52 ("God has no name as a man has").

² H. A. Wolfson began his article, *Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides* (*HTR* 50, 1957, 145-156), by saying: "By the time the Fathers of the Church began to offer negation as a solution to the problem of divine attributes, the theory of negative attributes had already been dealt with by Philo, Albinus, and Plotinus." But Wolfson deals mainly with a period later than the second century, treating Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa (fourth century), pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500) and John of Damascus (eighth century).

³ "We shall achieve the first idea of God by making successive abstractions, just as we get the conception of a point by abstraction from what is sensible, removing first the idea of a surface, then that of a line, till finally we have a point." (Albinus, *Epitome* 10, 5, as translated in H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, Cambridge 1953, 429, n. 4.) Cf. Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 5, 11, 71; R. E. Witt, *Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism* (Cambridge 1937) 132-133. There is perhaps one example of remotion in Theophilus, *To Autolycus* 1, 3; see below at n. 75.

⁴ J. Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, II: Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (London 1973) 323, with reference to E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig 1913).

⁵ *Agnostos Theos* 113.

⁶ *Ibid.* 84, where Norden cites as examples *aoratos*, *atheōrētos*, *akatalēptos* and *aphanēs*.

⁷ L. W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr. His life and thought* (Cambridge 1967) 81, with reference to E. R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr* (Jena 1923).

⁸ See Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* 323-328.

⁹ Thus the summary quotation from Goodenough (*Theology of J.M.* 130) in Barnard (*Justin Martyr* 81) needs to be balanced by another: "For the purpose of this brief review only one school, the later Platonic, needs any detailed examination, for in matters metaphysical it was the philosophic school which most influenced Christianity" (Goodenough, *Theology of J.M.* 20).

¹⁰ A. Puech, *Les Apologistes Grecs du I^{er} Siècle de notre ère* (Paris 1912) 185 (with reference to Athenagoras), cf. 292 (apologists generally); R. A. Norris, *God and World in Early Christian Theology* (London 1966) 49 (Justin, "following the Middle Platonists and Philo"); Barnard, *Justin Martyr* 34-35; *id.*, *Athenagoras* (Paris 1972) 84-85, 88; R. M. Grant, *Theophilus Ad Autolyicum* (Oxford 1971) xv; E. F. Osborn, *Justin Martyr* (Tübingen 1973) 14; *id.*, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (Cambridge 1981) 35 (Justin's term "ineffable").

¹¹ *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* 323-328.

¹² Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 2, 36.

¹³ A. H. Armstrong and R. A. Markus, *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy* (London 1960) 10-11.

¹⁴ Fragments 169-172 in G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge 1957) 168-169. The common, anthropomorphic view of the gods considers that they are born (frag. 170); but their consequent mortality is not mentioned.

¹⁵ Fragments 173-174 (Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers* 169). Cf. the recent discussion by F. M. Young in W. R. Schoedel and R. L. Wilken (edd.), *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition in honorem Robert M. Grant* (Paris 1979) 49.

¹⁶ R. K. Hack, *God in Greek Philosophy to the Time of Socrates* (Princeton 1931) 145-146.

¹⁷ Osborn, *Beginning of Christian Philosophy* 31.

¹⁸ Osborn, *Justin Martyr* 17.

¹⁹ G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London 1936) 4; quoted with approval by R. Braun, *Deus Christianorum. Recherches sur le vocabulaire doctrinal de Tertullien* (Paris 1977) 45. Cf. Prestige, *op. cit.* xix: "The terms used are often, though not wholly, negative in form, but they convey a sense which is definite and positive;" cf. *id. ib.* 41: "The philologically privative terms connote ultimate self-dependency and universal responsibility, and their connotation is therefore positive rather than negative." Cf. Osborn, *Justin Martyr* 17, 21; *id.*, *Beginning of Christian Philosophy* 37.

²⁰ Hack, *God in Greek Philosophy* 146-147.

²¹ Wolfson, *Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers* 146. Cf. Osborn, *Justin Martyr* 17: "Nor did Justin's negative theology fight with his positive theology; even the negative attributes of God were shown to have positive consequences such as the exclusion of certain kinds of worship."

²² J. Donaldson (*A Critical History of Christian Literature and Doctrine from the death of the Apostles to the Nicene Council* 3 vols.; London 1866) considers the teaching of each

apologist concerning God, Christ (the Logos), Holy Spirit, angels and demons, man, church and sacraments, eschatology, scriptures, morality.

²³ Puech (*Les Apologistes Grecs*) treats the teaching of the various apologists under the headings of God, the Word, matter, demonology, destiny of the human soul, freewill, sacraments. Cf. Goodenough (*Theology of J.M.*), who treats God, the Logos, the Holy Spirit and the Lower Powers, the Created World (Matter, Man, Sin), Christ, Redemption and the Christian Life, Eschatology.

²⁴ H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford 1966) 18-19. Cf. Barnard (*Justin Martyr*), who treats Justin's doctrine of God; the Logos; the Holy Spirit, Trinity, and Angelic Powers; Creation, Incarnation and Redemption; Church and Sacraments; Christian Life; and Eschatology. Cf. also Barnard's *Athenagoras*, where he follows a similar dogmatic outline.

²⁵ See the discussion in Goodenough, *Theology of J.M.*, ch. IV, esp. 124-133; Barnard, *Justin Martyr*, ch. VI, esp. 79-80; Osborn, *Justin Martyr*, ch. I, esp. 20-26.

²⁶ Both Ubaldi and Pellegrino, and Barnard, treat the *Plea for the Christians* and *On the Resurrection* together, when outlining Athenagoras's doctrine of God. See Atenagora, *La Supplica per I Christiani; Della Resurrezione dei Morti*, ed. P. Ubaldi and M. Pellegrino (Turin 1949) XXI; Barnard, *Athenagoras* 85-89. However, these writers do not actually draw any negative theological language from *On the Resurrection*. (They could have referred to *Res.* 12, 3: "God did not make man ... for his own use; for he is not in need of anything, and for one who needs nothing, nothing at all of what has been made by him would contribute anything to his own use;" cf. 12, 4: "the immortals being in need of nothing.")

²⁷ Cf. Puech (*Les Apologistes Grecs* 209) writing of the time of Theophilus: "The apologetic genre loses its true nature by trying to expand, and thus reveals a certain exhaustion just at the time when the Latins, Minucius Felix and Tertullian, are going to borrow it from the Greeks and renew it. One foresees that the third century is going to feel new needs, to which a whole new literature will respond."

²⁸ P. Keresztes, *The Literary Genre of Justin's First Apology*, *VC* 19 (1965) 99-110, at 100.

²⁹ Keresztes, *Literary Genre* 108; cf. 109: "All the places scattered throughout the Apology, that could possibly suggest a missionary-protreptic purpose on Justin's part are rhetorical devices and, in the context, serve the one and only purpose of advising the Emperor to change the current course of justice in Asia." Keresztes stretches the evidence in a different direction when he argues that Tertullian in his *Apology* "produced this display following the devices and the style of the classical *epideictic* rhetoric;" see P. Keresztes, *Tertullian's Apologeticus: A Historical and Literary Study*, *Latomus* 25 (1966) 124-133 at 133.

³⁰ A. J. Malherbe, *The Structure of Athenagoras, 'Supplicatio pro Christianis,' VC* 23 (1969) 1-20 at 3.

³¹ R. M. Grant, *The Chronology of the Greek Apologists*, *VC* 9 (1955) 25-33 at 30.

³² W. Schneemelcher in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha, II* (London 1965) 96.

³³ Cf. Clement's connecting clauses: "Then he adds" (*Strom.* 6, 5, 39, 4); "Peter himself will make clear, adding" (6, 5, 40, 1); "Again he will add something like this" (6, 5, 41, 1); "Then he further adds the finishing touch to the enquiry" (6, 5, 41, 4).

³⁴ Part of frag. 2 (a), Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *N. T. Apocrypha II*, 99 (Clem. Alex.

Strom. 6, 5, 39, 2-3). Daniélou (*Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* 325) briefly discusses the attribute "having no need" as it occurs in Plato (*Timaeus* 33D) and Albinus (*Ep.* 10, 3) and in the context of "the critique of the pagan gods, where it is a commonplace of Jewish missionary style" (*Letter of Aristaeas*; Josephus; Philo). For more detailed discussion, see B. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Lund 1955) 215-218.

³⁵ But cf. in a "redemption" rather than a "creation" context, Ign. *Pol.* 3, 2: "the Invisible, who for us (became) visible, ... the Impassible, who for us (became) subject-to-suffering."

³⁶ Continuation of frag. 2 (a) (Hennecke and Schneemelcher) (Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 6, 5, 39, 4-41, 6).

³⁷ The argument against pagan deities, on the grounds that they are merely material idols, is Jewish: e.g. Isa. 44, 9-20; Jer. 10, 1-16; Ps. 115, 1-8. Marrou goes further and claims that "this irony with regard to the idol comes not only from the *Preaching of Peter*, and through it from the Psalmists and Prophets of Israel, it also belongs to the most authentic classical tradition from Heraclitus or Herodotus down to Horace or Lucian" (*À Diognète*, ed. H. I. Marrou, Paris 1965, 108). However, the concern of the Greek and Roman writers, who deal with idolatry, seems rather different to that of Judaism. The Jews aimed to reject pagan deities as being merely material. The pagan writers, when they were not merely making a joke, wished to distinguish between mere images and true deity. Within the pagan context, some supported and some opposed the use of images as an aid to worship. For a fuller treatment, see B. H. W. von Borries, *Quid veteres philosophi de idololatria senserint* (Göttingen 1918). The Christian apologetic purpose is the heir to Judaism rather than Hellenism in this respect. Cf. also Gärtner, *Areopagus Speech* 219-228.

³⁸ *À Diognète*, ed. Marrou, 245.

³⁹ See the table in *À Diognète*, ed. Marrou, 242-243; cf. *The Epistle to Diognetus*, ed. H. G. Meecham (Manchester 1949) 18-19.

⁴⁰ Marrou sees the writing as having "an undoubted relationship and points of contact, partial but numerous, with the group of apologetic and protreptic writings of the years 120-210, but these connexions are particularly close with the two extreme groups, that is, on the one hand with the earliest surviving apologies, fragments of the *Preaching of Peter* and Aristides, and on the other hand with the latest writers of the period under consideration, namely Hippolytus of Rome and Clement of Alexandria" (*À Diognète* 260). While acknowledging arguments for the earlier extreme, Marrou himself prefers the later limit. Considerations which favour an appreciably earlier date in the second century may be found in Meecham's careful introduction, esp. 19 and 58 ff. However, a date in the 120's A.D. should not be accepted on the grounds of Andriessen's theory, that *Diogn.* constitutes the lost apology of Quadratus. See P. Andriessen, *The Authorship of the Epistula ad Diognetum*, *VC* 1 (1947) 129-136; and Marrou's counter-arguments in *À Diognète* 256-259.

⁴¹ After a gap in the manuscript, chh. 11-12 probably belong to another work by a different writer. Marrou, opting for a date in the last decade of the second century, includes chh. 11-12 in the same writing with chh. 1-10 (*À Diognète* 263). L. W. Barnard (*The Epistle ad Diognetum, Two Units from One Author?*, *ZNW* 56, 1965, 130-137) dates chh. 1-10 about 130 A.D. or a little earlier, and regards chh. 11-12 as part of a Paschal homily from the same author about 140 A.D.

⁴² Gärtner (*Areopagus Speech* 216-218) distinguishes an abstract philosophical use of this attribute, and a more polemical use in relation to cult; he finds both uses both in Judaism and in Graeco-Roman literature.

⁴³ The point is emphasized as the passage continues: "For he, who made the heaven and the earth and all that is in them and who provides us all with what we need, would himself need none of these things which he himself supplies to those who think they are giving them ... and they seem to supply to him who is in need of nothing" (3, 4-5).

⁴⁴ The term seems incidental here, anticipating the significant use of this attribute below (8, 5-6).

⁴⁵ Grant (Chronology 25) gives reasons for preferring the more precise date of 143 A.D.

⁴⁶ This outline follows the Syriac version. The publication of Greek fragments of the *Apology* of Aristides in 1922 and 1923 showed that the Syriac was closer to the scope of the original Greek than had previously been believed. See B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Part XV (London 1922) 2-3 (No. 1778); H. J. M. Milne, A New Fragment of the *Apology* of Aristides, *JTS* 25 (1923-24) 73-77; this papyrus has the British Museum Inv. No. 2486. There remains the difficulty, that the correspondence between the division of races in ch. 2 and the actual treatment in chh. 3 ff. is more plausible in the Greek of *Barlaam and Josaphat* than in the Syriac. See R. Raabe, *Die Apologie des Aristides. Texte und Untersuchungen* 9, 1 (Leipzig 1892) 27-29. For present purposes, what Aristides actually does is more important than what he says he will do.

⁴⁷ The *Apology* of Aristides is more or less fully extant in two versions: one in Syriac, and one in Greek embedded in the medieval romance of *Barlaam and Josaphat* (hereafter *BJ*); see J. R. Harris and J. A. Robinson, *The Apology of Aristides*, Texts and Studies 1, 1 (Cambridge 1891). In ch. 1 the Syriac version is much more elaborate than *BJ*. However, in addition to *POxy* 1778 (covering chh. 5b-6) and British Museum Inv. No. 2486 (covering part of chh. 15-16), there exists for ch. 1 the control of two Armenian fragments; see Harris and Robinson, *Apology* 27-28, for a Latin translation of one, and *ibid.* 30-31 for an English translation of the other. On this evidence, the Syriac must be regarded as closer than *BJ* to the scope of the original Greek.

⁴⁸ "... He is incomprehensible in His nature—and that I should dispute concerning the steadfastness of His government, so as to comprehend it fully, is not profitable for me; for no one is able perfectly to comprehend it" (tr. Harris).

⁴⁹ Some of these negative expressions are balanced by reciprocal affirmative statements: "He stands in need of nought, but everything stands in need of Him;" "the heavens do not contain Him; but the heavens and all things ... are contained in Him;" "He asks not anything from anyone; but all ask from Him" (tr. Harris).

⁵⁰ Extracts from ch. 13 (tr. Harris). For Graeco-Roman philosophical background to this section, see e.g. the Academic-Sceptic criticisms of the Stoic position in Cic. *N.D.* 3, 20 ff. For Hellenistic-Jewish background, see e.g. Wis. 13; Philo, *Decal.* 53 ff.

⁵¹ Aristides approves the monotheism of the Jews and admires their philanthropy, in which they imitate God; but to him their ritual, imperfectly observed, indicates that they worship angels, not God (14). Cf. *Preaching of Peter* 2 (a) (Hennecke and Schneemelcher) (Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 6, 5, 41). Aristides begins his treatment of the Christians with their concept of God the creator, but quickly moves on to Christian behaviour (15-16). The concluding chapter (17) summarizes the errors of the Greeks, and pleads for fair treatment of Christians.

⁵² Grant (Chronology 26) prefers a date late in the period 149-154 A.D., the years of L. Munatius Felix's prefecture of Egypt (mentioned 1 *Apol.* 29, 2).

⁵³ E. R. Hardy in C. C. Richardson (ed.), *Early Christian Fathers* (Library of Christian Classics, I; London 1953) 236.

⁵⁴ For some alternative analyses, see A. W. F. Blunt (ed.), *The Apologies of Justin Martyr* (Cambridge 1911) lv-lvii; Goodenough, *Theology of J.M.* 82-83; J. Quasten, *Patrology*, I (Utrecht and Brussels 1950) 199-200; Hardy in *Early Christian Fathers* 236; Keresztes, *Literary Genre* 101-106; Barnard, *Justin Martyr* 15-17.

⁵⁵ "Hence we are actually called atheists; and we confess that we are atheists with regard to such beings as are commonly accepted as gods, but not with regard to the most true God ..." (1 *Apol.* 6, 1). Cf. Polycarp's deliberate misapplication of the cry "Away with the atheists" (*Mart. Pol.* 9, 2).

⁵⁶ Christians do not honour man-made objects called gods, since "these are lifeless and dead and do not have the form of God" (1 *Apol.* 9, 1); to give these objects the name of gods is considered "not only irrational, but an insult to God, who, though possessing ineffable glory and form, has his name applied to corruptible things in need of care" (9, 3).

⁵⁷ 1 *Apol.* 10, 1. This attribute appears again in the context of defence against the charge of atheism at 1 *Apol.* 13, 1: "Therefore ... we are not atheists, since we worship the creator of the universe, and say ... that he is not in need of blood, libations and incense, and praise him ... with the word of prayer and thanksgiving for all that we receive ..."

⁵⁸ 1 *Apol.* 10, 1. This attribute is not required by Justin's argument at this point, but does recall the epithet "ineffable" in 9, 3. These are common attributes of God in Justin; see Barnard, *Justin Martyr* 34-35, with reference to 1 *Apol.* 9, 3; 10, 1; 61, 11; 2 *Apol.* 6, 1-2; 11, 4; 13, 4; *Dial.* 126, 2; 127, 2-4.

⁵⁹ "Therefore pay what is Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God" (1 *Apol.* 17, 2, quoting the form of the saying in Matt. 22, 21).

⁶⁰ Other negative theological terms occur incidentally with reference to the "ineffable" origin of Jesus (1 *Apol.* 51, 1; here only *anekdiēgetos* instead of Justin's usual *arrētos*) and to the "unnamable" God (1 *Apol.* 63, 1). In 2 *Apol.* Justin merely uses two of his standard terms, when he claims that Christians are innocent of the fabulous actions of the pagans, having "the unbegotten and ineffable God" as witness of their thoughts and actions (2 *Apol.* 12, 4).

⁶¹ Grant (Chronology 28) put the apology early in 177 A.D., after the endowment of teachers of philosophy in Athens in autumn 176 A.D., but before Tatian heard of the accession of Commodus. M. Elze prefers an earlier date, but only specifies the broad limits from before the death of Justin to 176 A.D.; see M. Elze, *Tatian und seine Theologie* (Göttingen 1960) 43-44.

⁶² Tatian exploits a traditional Hellenistic opposition between Greek and barbarian wisdom. While "barbarian" is not simply synonymous with "Christian" for Tatian, the former is meant to include the latter in particular here. See J. H. Waszink, *Some Observations on the Appreciation of "the Philosophy of the Barbarians" in Early Christian Literature*, in L. J. Engels, H. W. F. M. Hoppenbrouwers and A. J. Vermeulen (edd.), *Melanges offerts à Mademoiselle Christine Mohrmann* (Utrecht 1963) 41-56.

⁶³ Tatian uses "philosophy" with reference to Christianity at 30, 1; 35, 1; cf. Justin, *Dial.* 8, 1; Melito, *Apology* frag. 3 *init.*

⁶⁴ "Finally, knowing who God is and what his creative activity is, I present myself to you ready for the examination of our doctrines, on the understanding that on my part there will be no denial of our life-style in accordance with God" (42 *fin.*).

⁶⁵ Cf. the terminology of the martyrdom accounts, e.g. *Mart. Pol.* 2, 4; 9, 2; Eus. *H.E.* 5, 1, 25; 33; 46; 47; 48; 50 (martyrs of Vienne and Lyons); also *Diogn.* 7, 7; 10, 7.

⁶⁶ "But since our teaching believes in one God, the creator of this universe, himself uncreated (for what exists is not created, but what does not exist), but having created all things through the word which comes from him, it is irrational that we suffer on both counts, being both slandered (i.e. accused of impiety) and persecuted" (4, 2).

⁶⁷ According to Athenagoras, Lysis the Pythagorean says that God is an "ineffable number" (6, 1); Plato thinks of "the uncreated and eternal God as one" (6, 2); the Aristotelian school believes that God's soul, although the cause of his body's motion, is itself "unmoved" (6, 3). Athenagoras's sources are not necessarily authentic nor correctly understood: "... the Pythagorean texts which he invokes, those of Philolaus, Lysis and Opsimus, are not authentic; but they were surely considered as such by almost everybody in the second century" (Puech, *Les Apologistes Grecs* 179; cf. J. Geffcken, *Zwei griechische Apologeten*, Leipzig 1907, 173); Barnard (*Athenagoras* 42) shows that Athenagoras has probably misunderstood his source for the Aristotelian concept of the body of God.

⁶⁸ "The maker and father of this universe does not need blood, nor fat, nor the fragrance from flowers and incense, since he is himself perfect fragrance and has no needs nor requirements" (13, 2).

⁶⁹ Cf. Tatian, *Address* 4, 2; for biblical background to the image of the potter and his clay, cf. Isa. 29, 16; 45, 9; 64, 8; Jer. 18, 1-12; Wis. 15, 7-13; Eccclus. 33, 13; Rom. 9, 21.

⁷⁰ Theophilus's chronology of the world terminates with the death of Marcus Aurelius (17 March 180 A.D.).

⁷¹ Theophilus reports Autolycus as having asked: "Show me your God" (1, 2 *init.*; recapitulated 1, 14 *fin.*; cf. 2, 1, referring back to Book 1 as an exposition of the Christian religion (*theosebeia*).

⁷² There has been a shift from the antiquity of the "scriptures" (*grammata*) in 3, 1 to that of the "teaching" (*logos*) in 3, 16.

⁷³ Cf. Ps. 115, 4-6; 135, 15-17. Among earlier apologetic writings, cf. *Preaching of Peter* frag. 2 (a) (Hennecke and Schneemelcher; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 6, 5, 40, 1); *Diogn.* 2, 2-4; Aristides, *Apol.* 3; Tatian, *Address* 4, 2; Athenagoras, *Plea* 15.

⁷⁴ Their inadequacy is made clearer in Novatian's imitation of this passage: *siue enim illum dixeris lucem, creaturam ipsius magis quam ipsum dixeris; ipsum non expresseris* etc. (*De Trinitate* 2).

⁷⁵ Wolfson, *Negative Attributes* 146. A partly parallel list in *Diogn.* 9, 6 is used in a purely positive way.

⁷⁶ In 1, 2, in response to Autolycus's demand "Show me your God," Theophilus says: "Show that your eyes can see ...; for just as those who see with the eyes of the body observe the affairs of earthly life, distinguishing things that differ, whether light or darkness, etc. ..., so in the case of ... the eyes of the soul it would be possible to look at God. For God is seen by those who are able to see him ..." Just as those who are wholly or partially blind fail to see the light of the sun, "so you, sir, have your eyes covered over by your sins and evil actions ... When there is rust on a mirror, it is not possible to see a man's face in the mirror; so too, when there is sin in a man, such a man cannot see God ... So too your impiety, sir, shrouds you in darkness so that you cannot see God." In 1, 3 Theophilus relates the first negative attributes to the sphere of vision: "the form of God is ineffable and inexpressible, since it cannot be seen by human eyes."

⁷⁷ This attribute did not appear in its own right in the list in 1, 3.

⁷⁸ "Which, then, of the so-called philosophers, poets and historians was capable of telling the truth about these matters, having been born much later and having introduced a multitude of gods?" (2, 33 *init.*)

⁷⁹ G. W. H. Lampe (*A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961, 185b) wrongly takes *aplanētos* (v. 28) as referring to *tribos* (fem., "way," v. 23), ignoring *houtos* (masc.) in v. 28.

⁸⁰ "Oh, the atheistic teaching of those who recorded, or rather taught, such things; oh, their impiety and atheism ... Those who laid down these doctrines filled the world with impiety." (3, 5 *fin.*)

⁸¹ Cf. Athenagoras's *Plea*, where atheism, cannibalism and sexual immorality were treated as the three basic charges against Christianity; outside the apologists, cf. e.g. the account of the martyrs of Vienne and Lyons, Eus. *H.E.* 5, 1, 9-10 (atheism) and 14 (cannibalism and incest).

⁸² Those criticized on this ground include the atomists, Plato, Pythagoras, Clitomachus the Academic, Sceptics and Euhemerus "the most atheistic" (3, 7). The claim of 3, 7 *init.* is reversed in 3, 8 *init.*: "For while denying that the gods exist they themselves acknowledge it again ..."

⁸³ Theophilus again rejects charges of sexual immorality and cannibalism, as he summarizes the ethics commanded by God (3, 15 *init.*); and again cannibalism is branded as "the most atheistic thing of all," though atheism is not here a separate charge (cf. 3, 5).

⁸⁴ Cf. Barnard, *Athenagoras* 88: "... Athenagoras ... takes from Middle Platonism only what will serve his Christian purpose."

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